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ZINNIAS

By MARY WOLFE THOMPSON

Jean did not call mother. That dreary treadmill of soft and innocent suggestion would begin soon enough, she reflected, piling up like snow, avalanching you, crushing your fine resolves, your tenderness; those If-I-was-yous, those What-are-you-doing-that-fors, those You-never-tell-me-anythings; even the "huh" that was an inevitable part of deafness, and the forgetfulness that was an inevitable part of age. All a repetition that like snowflakes made the avalanche, a repetition that like cleats made a treadmill. Yes, that would begin soon enough. She tiptoed past Mother's door.

She flung open the windows and let in the sweet early air, feeling almost as if she shooed out the last of the night with her hands, for the maple trees held the rooms in heavy shadow, although upstairs the sun was throwing red-orange squares on the walls, squares with little gleams in them like a brook bottom.

Those glowing squares always reminded Jean of the white-walled hospital, when she, just a young girl in training, got up in the early mornings, and dressed, singing, in her tiny room, while those same squares turned everything rose-colored. And everything was rose-colored then, no duty hanging about her neck like a mill-

stone, but a clear road ahead. How her feet had danced along that road, rising, rising until on a hilltop of success, the control of a great operating room was hers. And from her hilltop she had seen other hilltops, mountains, one quite near. It seemed only yesterday that the great surgeon of the city had had an operation at her hospital. She had watched him with eyes that could hardly believe, doing marvellous delicate things. She had brushed aside the clumsy novitiates, blind to this miracle, assisted him herself, knowing intuitively what he wanted. And when it was over, she and this great man had looked at each other, a flash like lightning between them, mind to mind. He had sought her out later. "Miss Harrison, I have plans, not mature yet, for a hospital of my own. When it is ready will you come? I'd like to have you work with me." Again the flash: "You seem to understand."

And she had nodded, filled with a singing sense of power.

Thud, thud, thud. It was the old dog patting his tail on the floor as she approached him. She opened the door and he ambled out, pausing on the sill to investigate this new day with a lifted nose. Presumably he found it good, for he trotted, wagging, away; but Jean felt that for her it had not opened auspiciously. It never helped any to remember.

She went to the foot of the stairs and gave her brother a soft halloo. "Willie, old duck, going to sleep all day?" Then again she tiptoed past the white-paneled door of the downstairs bedroom. It was no use, however. The jangle of wash-stand crockery told her that Mother had called herself.

As she served the cereal, the doorknob rattled, and the creak of boards and the tap of a cane told her that Mother was coming. Jean did not look up. She knew without looking how that stooped, round little figure appeared;

how the cane quivered under the old hand, how the old knees bent reluctantly and compelled her feet to drag; knew how, above it all, the lovely, round, rosy old face smiled under the rippling white hair. Smiled? Glowed! And the voice glowed, too: "Good morning! Good morning!" How could you feel so exuberant in the morning?

Jean said good morning in a voice that she knew Mother's deaf ears could not hear. Hateful, she told herself; but her temper stood firm against her will.

Mother dropped like thunder into her chair. The old knees could not hold her; she had to drop; and clattering her cane into a corner, she said playfully, "That's right! I wouldn't speak either 'f I'z you!"

"I did speak!" Why was it that it always made you mad to shout?

Mother jerked the sugar towards her. It had all gone by. "My trotters are awful stiff this morning, it's so cold. It's awful in my bedroom," she complained to Willie. "Jean won't let me close my winders. And it's cold in here, all the doors and winders open." She pulled her shawl up around her throat and gave an exaggerated shiver.

Damn. Jean set down the cream. She wished she could take her breakfast to the doorsill which she could glimpse from her chair, and just think of nothing but that growing brightness, new leaves casting new shadows on the grass, birds shouting, and a little wind laughing over everything, running its hand over the grass blades, whisking the sweet wood smoke away from the chimney in long strands and curlicues. But that old voice would follow. Jean could hear it. "Jin! Jin! 'F I'z you I'd come inside! You'll catch cold!" Jean swallowed the oatmeal in gulps.

Willie shoved back in his chair, and scooped his thick fingers clumsily across his head. His eyes, almost as clouded as Mother's, stared for a minute. What must it

be, Jean wondered, to live so, so remotely, as Willie? He almost never spoke. His face hardly ever changed expression. His body moved without personality. Perhaps the sunstroke had sort of loosened his soul from his body, and the body mugged along, did its round of duties by itself. It would not be hard for Willie to die, she reflected, with his soul already loosened.

Willie was Jean's second millstone, not so heavy as Mother, to be sure, but a considerable burden. Perhaps he might have been transplanted, though with all the risk of setting a wild field thing in soil sterile to it because of its unsuitability. Well, why think of it? No use. Mother, that fragile old plant, had roots that bled if they were touched — fine roots, deep roots, spreading roots, impossible to dig out in a solid clump as you would a dahlia. Jean knew. She had tried once. Once she had talked persuasively of the sunniness, the coziness of old ladies' homes; the companionship that old people found with other old people; how their neighbor, Mrs. Kemp, was in an old ladies' home and liked it. Mother had said, "But she hasn't got chick nor child to take care of her!" and later had referred to Mrs. Kemp as "in the Poor-house." However, Jean had bundled Mother into the car and taken her to see Mrs. Kemp.

Mother had forgotten where they were going when they got there, and in spite of the sunshine, the buildings had an institutional feeling, the hard conformity of the long lines of windows and unvarying curtains. She peered out of the car suspiciously, "What place is this?"

"It's the old ladies' home. We're going to call on Mrs. Kemp."

Mother had clenched the side of the car until her old knuckles whitened. "No, no, no, no!" she had almost screamed, so loud that passers by had turned their heads.

"Just go in and see her for a minute, Mother!"

"No, no!"

What could you do with old knuckles, gnarled with work they had done for you, clenched on the side of a car? Could you wrench them loose, pry them away finger by finger?

Jean had taken Mother home, and afterwards had seen her going about her room, touching her little possessions as a child might who had feared never to see them again. And the old heart had been bad, so bad that Jean had lain all night on a couch in Mother's room, starting up with held breath at times to listen in the dark for that husky old breathing. Ah yes, Mother had roots that bled.

Willie would have left the house without speaking, but Jean stopped him. "What are you going to do today?"

"Plough, I s'pose."

"Don't you think we ought to start the garden?"

"I s'pose it's about time."

"Can you spare a few hours?"

"I guess so."

"Then you spade, and I'll plant this afternoon." She looked through the opened door. "And I want a long flower bed from the maple tree to the lilac bush." Right where I can see it from here, she thought. She visualized meals when she looked beyond Mother and Willie to the flowers.

Willie trundled out without a word, and an hour later Jean saw him with the spade. One thing at a time for Willie. He had forgotten the garden and was digging the flower bed. A long line of dark mold gaped in the green lawn.

"Jin! Jin! Did you know Willie's digging up the lawn?" The old figure trembled in the doorway.

"Yes."

"What's he doin' it for?"

"I told him to."

"What for? You never tell me anything."

"For flowers."

"Oh. I'd a thought you'd had 'em in the garden." Mother half turned away. "What kind of flowers?"

"Zinnias."

"Huh?"

"Zinnias!"

"Zinners? Dunno as I ever heard of them, but they's so many new kinds." Mother looked like a bewildered child.

Jean melted. "Mrs. Everett gave me the seed. They're round and kind of like a double daisy, only bigger. All colors!" she shouted.

Mother glowed. "They'll be real pretty. I can see 'em from my winder where I set so much."

And I too, I too, thought Jean. Oh, why can't I always be kind! She thought of how short the time that those old eyes could still see flowers.

At eleven Jean scurried to put the cabbage on. There, potatoes at half past, dinner at twelve. Then she would plant that afternoon. She checked up the morning's work. Churning done, beds made, upstairs swept. She had meant to wash a few windows, but you couldn't do everything in one morning.

Mother came and sat in the rocker near the stove. "There's an awful draft here." She looked significantly at door and window.

"I can't help it. I can't work with it all shut up. Sit somewhere else."

Mother tightened her shawl. "I s'pose I feel it settin' round doing nothing."

"That's just it!" Jean could feel the red rising. "If you'd get some exercise you'd be better. Here you are in May with a shawl over your sweater. You never stop to see whether it's cold or not; you just bundle up. You'll make yourself so tender that you'll have pneumonia, and I can't help it."

"But my knees are so lame, Jinnie. I can't walk. It makes 'em hurt so."

"And the less you walk the worse they'll be!" Jean banged the potatoes over the fire.

Mother shied away. "'F I'z you, I'd salt them potatoes now so's I wouldn't forget it."

The red swamped everything else. How many times had Mother said: "'F I'z you, I'd salt them potatoes'"? How many days? How many times a day? Sitting in front of the stove where Jean must circle around her: "'F I'z you, I'd salt them potatoes!"

Jean turned. "Get out! Go to your own room! I'm here to take care of you, and I will take care of you, but I won't be tormented to death. You tell me how to cook! You —" Jean's hand rose and she felt like hammering the table.

Mother began to sing.

*"Have you any troubles?
Tell them to the Lord!"*

but she moved unsteadily toward the door. She turned at the sill, a bad old child. "Never mind! When you're old and I'm young, I'll take care of you!"

When you're old and I'm young! Jean remembered when Mother was young, hurrying about as she did now, trying the potatoes, creaming the cabbage, browning the ham, and the playfulness which she found so annoying had been great fun to a little child. You fool, you! she reviled herself. Why can't you be kind? You'll be old soon enough. Self pity shook her. And little enough you will have had, no success, no love. Mother had had love. And Jean had seen love, the real thing, in the hospitals; on the faces of the dying, in the eyes of men and women as they met above a new born child. She had wanted love, still wanted it when she let herself think, longed for it, ached for it, knew that if it came, work, the great surgeon, all would dwarf to nothing, would be hurled away like a dead leaf from a tree top. Oh, God,

couldn't she have love? Tears came in a silver wall and blotted out the dark old kitchen. Jean brushed them aside, smiled at the bubbling kettle lid. Well, this was a day! Some days weren't so bad; some days she had a little philosophy, but today everything had her by the throat.

Dinner was on time, to Jean a miserable choking meal. Mother broke the silence. "It's a nice day to go ridin'!" She scraped the last of the sugar from her cup as intently as a child.

Jean set her lips.

"'F I'z you I'd go ridin'!"

Jean looked at the cloth, turned a spoon over and over.

"Are you going ridin' today?"

"No."

"Oh, dear, I do enjoy it so. Why don't you go?"

"If you had all the work to do you'd know."

"Yes, I s'pose so. Are you going tomorrow?"

Two o'clock. Jean knelt in the grass beside the new flower bed. The sun enfolded her, laid a warm finger along the part of her hair. It warmed the newly turned ground and dried the crumbling edges to a lighter hue. It narrowed Jean's world down to a golden haze, just sunshine, warm flesh.

"Jin!" Jean's horizon leaped to include Mother. Mother was on the doorstep. Impossible to make her hear there. Jean made a negative motion and went on smoothing a shallow bed for the zinnias. She did not look, but she knew that the old figure was coming towards her, wabbling unsteadily on the grass.

"What you doing?" The morning's explanation had faded like the trail of a twig on water.

"Planting flower seeds."

"What kind?"

"Zinnias."

Mother shook her head. "Come on and go ridin', Jinnie. I enjoy it so."

"No."

Silence while Mother dragged away. Jean spread the zinnia seed and felt as contemptible as — as a worm. But worms weren't really contemptible. They lived just as they were meant to, didn't torment old people. Jean had a vision of an elderly worm, gray whiskers or something, reclining on a hillock, other worms about him, bowing. She laughed, then choked. There was more tragedy than fun about it. She looked across the valley, toasting in the sun, and above the village saw the church spire. Below the spire, she knew, were the graves. How soon these old hands would lie quiet in the darkness, how few springs were left, how few days left "to go ridin'." Patience, God, patience!

At four o'clock Jean was tired. The zinnias were planted. So were the first of the garden things, — lettuce, peas, radishes — all in warm brown beds. Jean dragged herself upstairs to rest. She lay down and closed her eyes, her thoughts spinning on and on; but pretty soon the wheel slowed, the skeins tangled, and her consciousness had just fixed itself on, "And the cat had a ridiculous collar, a ridieu — " when, "Jin! Jin!" — Mother's cane pounded hard and sharp — "There's a car coming!"

Jean lay in vitriolic silence. She knew that Mother listened a minute, then went searching for her. She heard her calling, "Jin! Jin!" at the back door.

Then Jean heard the rattle of the car, jerked herself up, dipped a finger in her pitcher and moistened each eye, slipped downstairs, and out of the front door.

A Ford stood at the gate. Irv Winslow had brought his mother to call. He had come a good deal of late, had made a great effort to be nice, and Jean had speculated on the reason. Something drove him. Not liking of her; she was sure of that.

"Hello there!" Jean knew that her loneliness made her too eager, too cordial. "It's awfully good of you to come."

The Winslows looked gratified. Irv grinned and allowed his mother to climb down unassisted. "You go in and see Mis' Harrison, Ma. I'll gas Jean." He looped himself over the wheel.

"Just a minute." Jean took Ma Winslow's arm, Ma with her silk gloves and her hat with the licked-looking bow on it. "Mother probably won't remember you at first, but she'll be ever so glad to see you."

Mother stood on the porch, her old face glowing. "Mrs. Winslow, Mother!" Jean shouted.

Mother held out her hand. "Your face looks familiar, but I can't place you. I'm so fergitful. Have I ever met you before?"

"Yas, lots of times, Mis' Harrison. I'm your next neighbor, you know." She turned to Jean. "Awful to see 'em fail so, ain't it?" she said in an undertone. She spoke as if she felt herself clothed in immortality.

"Got your house-cleaning done?" Mrs. Winslow dropped into the spring-rocker.

"Almost."

"Land! I finished mine in Aperl." Mrs. Winslow's lightning eye flashed about the parlor, and Jean was conscious of a little woolly dog of dust under the whatnot. Mrs. Winslow would multiply him by forty. She could hear her saying, "Dust on everything an inch thick! Land!"

Irv bellowed from the car and Jean slipped out, Mrs. Winslow's voice following her, "It's awful nice for you to have Jean to take care of you, she being a trained nurse and everything, Mis' Harrison."

And Mother's voice, "Well, I donno. Jean's awful hard on me. She ain't no patience with old folks, and I suppose I'm a torment."

Jean could see Mrs. Winslow prick her ears. I deserve it, she told herself.

Irv leered at her. "I'm here to see you! Come sit beside me!" He thumped the seat.

Jean slid in. It made his face too close. Horrid, but she was caught.

"How are y' today?"

"Fine." Jean hated the scrutiny. She felt like shouting, "Yes, I am old. I'm forty! I've got wrinkles around my eyes! I'm thin! I'm an old maid! What do you come for? If you don't like me, stay away!"

"What makes your eyes snap so, Jin?" Irv laughed. "Won't bite, will y'?"

Jean laughed without feeling funny. She wondered how it sounded, wished she had a little mirror to see how she looked when she laughed and didn't feel funny. She speculated again. What did Irv want? Was it the farm? Irv could squeeze blood from a turnip, but there wasn't much blood in their half-worked old fields. Realizing that she must say something, she said, "How's your farm?"

"Fine. We ain't going to do much farming now. I'm kinda branching out into the lumber business. That's a fine lot of oak and hickory of yours!" His eye gleamed on the grove that covered the slope below them. "Your pa knew what he was doin' when he cleaned out the soft stuff and give it a chance."

Jean almost jumped. That was it. He wanted the grove, for nothing. She was the pound of coffee thrown into the bargain. What rapacity! To be willing to marry, to spend your life with someone you were indifferent to, all for a grove of trees, ultimate dollars and cents. Oh, of course that was not quite all. They were well-thought-of people. Mother had a little money. Jean would be a presentable wife.

Willie came round the corner, and Irv bellowed jovially, "Hi there, Will!"

Willie half raised his hand.

Jean saw a way out. "Oh, Willie, take Irv down to look at the grove. Maybe we can sell it to him."

Irv leered. "Buy it when I can git it for nothin'?" his eyes said. He scrambled out. Jean watched Willie plodding along beside him.

She went back to the house. Apparently the topic of conversation had not changed. Mother was saying, "I never knew old folks was so much trouble. My grandmother was at our house all the time when I was a child, and we never thought anything about it." She raised guileless eyes as Jean came in.

Mrs. Winslow eyed Jean with perceptible stiffness. "Your mother tells me she feels the cold."

That too, thought Jean. "Yes," she said professionally, "her heart action isn't very good."

"You may not have her with you long."

Jean looked at the rosy old face. God, why were people so torn? Not long would mean that she could begin to live again. Not long would mean that this old child must go down into the darkness. She was so wretched that she could make Mrs. Winslow no reply.

Mrs. Winslow rose to go. They stood in the door, and Mrs. Winslow's eye caught on the long line of mold. "What are you going to have there, Jean?"

"Flowers," said Mother suddenly. "'F I'z her, I'd a had 'em in the garden."

"What kind?" asked Mrs. Winslow.

"Zinnias."

"Huh?" said Mother.

"Zinnias!" Jean shouted.

"That's a new kind."

"Oh no, Mis' Harrison," Mrs. Winslow shrilled sweetly, "they're old as the hills. You and I call 'em Youth and Old Age. These young folks have to have a new name."

Youth and Old Age. What a lovely name! Jean instantly discarded zinnias.

Mother nodded recognition. "Oh, yes, I remember them. My mother had them in her garden."

Jean had a glimpse of that garden, seventy years ago. Sunshine, youth and old age, seventy years ago.

Mrs. Winslow went smiling away. Irv went smiling away. Jean judged that Irv's smile was short-lived, however, for at the gate he had to turn out to pass another car, a smart town car, and he must have recognized the occupant as she did, a Mr. Belding, member of a large lumber firm down the valley. She had heard him make a political address once.

The car came to a stop in front of her, and she saw that beside Mr. Belding nodded a gay geranium hat, and under the hat smiled a prettiness of flesh. Eyes blue as larkspurs, but with no more depth than if bits of the blue flower petals had been fitted in for irises. A mouth that curved in a sweetness without flavor. Mr. Belding looked intelligent, alert, yet he leaned towards this prettiness tenderly, and Jean saw and felt the pull of his attraction towards her. "You'll excuse me for a few minutes, or will you come too?"

"No," the hat nodded, "I'll stay right here." Its wearer's glance conveyed the feeling that she was too fragile for the rough, uneven ground.

"Miss Harrison?" Mr. Belding came towards Jean easily. "I'm Mr. Belding."

"Yes, I know."

He swung towards the car playfully. "You see? I'm a celebrity. Miss Harrison, Miss Mathews," he introduced them.

The hat nodded. Jean almost heard a crackling like thin ice.

Then Mr. Belding came directly and frankly to business. How unlike the circumlocutions of Irv! "I understand you have a good hardwood grove. If it's on the market I'd like to make you an offer."

Well! The grove must be valuable. Jean remembered

that once when she was a young girl her father had said, pointing to the slim young trees, "There's my nest egg for old age, Jeanie." But he had been spared old age, and the trees had grown to great shafts with limbs that spread and crossed in lovely pointed archways. Apparently the time had come. "Yes," she said aloud, "we might sell if the trees have reached maturity, and if it's a good time to sell."

Mr. Belding considered. "Lumber is high now, Miss Harrison, and so far as I can judge it won't be much if any higher for some time to come. Suppose we look at the trees."

They turned, Mr. Belding nodded again to the car, and they swung easily down towards the grove. Jean was conscious of a sort of rhythm of their bodies. She stole a glance at Mr. Belding. He was the kind of man she would like to marry. A tiny pang cut into her heart. If he would only like her!

It was almost shadowless in the grove. The hardwoods were slow in coming into leaf, and the tiny pale tips on the boughs hardly obscured the tracery of twigs against the sky. Mr. Belding moved among the trees glancing from bole to limb, from limb to spread of branches, calculating board feet, Jean supposed. She wondered how he did it.

A little breeze twittered the tiny new leaves, and she looked up. A sense of power filled her. Should she consign those young leaves and twigs to wither and be consumed in bonfires, while the great shafts and spreading limbs went the way of all lumber — beams and boards, masts tipping against the sky at sea, props lapped by the black water of mines, tiny things like matches. It meant the destruction of both life and beauty. "I don't know about selling!" she said, when Mr. Belding came back.

"I understand," he said. "I feel that, too." He waved

his arm toward the trees. "They seem to sort of — enjoy living. But then I figure that if it isn't I, it will be some other fellow, and I leave the ground in good condition for the next generation of trees, and the other fellow often doesn't. And in my opinion," he went on, "the grove has reached maturity. You see the dead limbs here and there?"

Jean nodded.

"It's"— he took pains to find the right words — "It's the recession of life. Funny words for a lumberman, eh? But that's it."

Oh, how pleasant he was, how intelligent! Jean's whole consciousness cried, Like me! Oh, like me! No, his glance told her that to him she had no more color, no more personality than the old gray boulder behind her.

They moved towards the car. Mr. Belding proceeded with his business. He would do a little figuring and mail her an offer. He was in a position to give her as good a price as anyone in the locality. Jean scarcely heard him.

Then he greeted the figure in the car, and there was the warmth, the tenderness, the flash of love. "I hope it hasn't seemed too long?" He lifted his hat from crisp, dark hair. There was the faint crackling of ice again. They were gone.

Emptiness, unendurable. Fill it with something. Jean fled to the kitchen, grabbed out pans, bent her whole energies on measuring flour, working in shortening, making hot biscuits for supper. Mother squealed when she saw them.

All over. Jean stood in the door. There were two hours of day light yet. The sun was still high above the maples. How rosy the light fell on the valley! How it picked out the church spire. It must make the white stones below look like living flesh. "Mother?" Jean smiled. "Want to go riding?"

"Yes." Mother began to heave herself up out of her chair, hesitated. "Can we get back before dark?"

"Yes."

"'F I'z you I'd a gone this afternoon." She limped away to get her hat.

Jean brought the Ford to the gate. Mother dragged down the path, hat askew, loaded with shawls, trying to hurry. "If I'd a-knowed," she panted, "I could a been ready, but you never tell me anything."

Jean felt her tenderness turn to prickles. "Do you want to go?" she said coldly.

"Yes, I do."

"Then get in."

They rattled across abandoned fields faintly green like sea water over white sand, through the little wood already shadowy, and stopped at the mail box by the public road. Jean clanged back the lid. It was empty, empty as her hands. Well, what did it matter? Suppose it had been full of letters, brimming, bursting; suppose the letter from the great surgeon had come. Could she have gone? No.

Oh, to set foot again upon the open road! She saw it stretching before her, the hilltop, other hilltops, mountains —

"Jin!"

Thud. She was back in the Ford.

"'F I'z you, I'd go back home."

Jean looked at the sun growing tremendously large and red as he approached the horizon, as if he were angry, defiant of the coming night. She turned the car towards him and drove for half an hour, right into his face. "Don't think! Don't think!" she cried to herself. "This succession of days, you mustn't wish them to end. It means death." She felt like a little girl — "It's wicked to wish anyone to die."

She turned towards home, and faced the moon, risen

before her time, so pale, so wan, so thin, thin as a disc of silver worn through in a pattern.

I am the moon, thought Jean.

At nine o'clock she lit Mother's lamp and set it on the bureau where it made another lamp in the mirror. Then she slid away to the porch. How the moonlight silvered the valley, and the gauze-like veils that the hollows had drawn over themselves. The old house was silver, and the lawn, and the sky. Only the shaft of yellow from Mother's lamp disturbed the exquisite gradations of gray.

Jean turned her own tiny lamp of attention upon herself. The man that afternoon. What could it be to be loved by such a man? How well they had understood each other; even their bodies had swung together. And he hadn't seen her. Why did you hope, fool? she asked herself savagely. You're too old for love. She had a sense of a door closing. The body growing too sparse, too old for love, and the soul, still young, entombed in it.

Doors were closing all about her. Soon science would have forged too far ahead for her to bridge the gap, her hand would have lost its cunning. Nothing, could she have nothing? Mercy, God, mercy! She lifted her eyes to the silver sky.

"Jin!" Mother's voice came from the kitchen. "Jin? Willie, do you know where Jin is?"

Willie mumbled something.

"Have we got to go to bed and leave the doors and winders open like this?"

Silence.

Jean, crouching like a mouse, heard Mother go into her bedroom, fumble about, rattle her crockery. At last she put out her lamp.

Then the moonlight was perfect.

THE RAGGED EDGE

By RAYMOND KRESENSKY

This is the frontier
Where lean oxen teams
Push the sage and buck-brush
Into the yellow sun
And drag thick-wheeled wagons
With tents.

Women, — like the yellow grasses in the sloughs
Where the buffalo have trampled, — broken,
With sunken chests, and backs
That look like packs — limp sunbonnets —
These ride.
Their hands hanging between their knees
Where the thin calico dips to the seat,
Are like dead prairie chickens.
Their hair is yellow against a coffee-brown face.
These brown faces show white marks
Where the wrinkles have laid in.

Touch a dainty fan to your nose,
These are the ladies of the territory.

Here come the men.
Stiff back whiskers and clothes
Gray with dust.
They are like the scrub oaks
That grow along the streams.
Their backs are bent and their heads
Dig into piles of yellow dust,
Stirred up by the slow teams.
Their eyes are half-closed
And maybe they see more
Than frontiers.

These are the men.
They walk and poke lazy teams
With willow poles.

You push aside the bark
Of old trees along the Missouri
And let them scratch their names.
Open the gates of Fort Union
And give them black coffee — whiskey.
Open the gates of the West.
Here they come.

SOLILOQUY IN DAYTIME

By BENJAMIN ROSENBAUM

The poplars run before me as a child
And hide behind the bend.
I find in all this silent loveliness
Of trees a quaint, sweet friend.

With green and purple thoughts, I walk the hills;
I linger near the sea
Not for the deeper shadows to come on
With evening mystery;

Nor for the red canoe of sunset on
Its way to whiter streams;
Nor for the overtones that stars and moon
Give me and take — night's dreams.

There is something in my Hebrew blood
That life has given me
And still withheld. . . . I have and yet have not
A tree, a hill, a sea.

YELLOW ANNIE

By DUDLEY CARROLL

At a table in the corner of the large, airy Merriweather kitchen, Annie Smith, a tall, slender, awkward girl of sixteen, almost white, with coarse straight hair in two plaits down her back and big grave eyes, had just finished paring potatoes into a pan of fresh water and was preparing to leave. Her work was done until supper-time.

Maggie, the black, scowling cook, who practically lived in the kitchen and ruled over it like a Czar, turned on the girl.

"Yo' min' yo' got 'em clean!"

"Dey clean."

The girl shrank from the fierce glare of the Amazon-like woman and watched her put her black hand into the pan, stirring the potatoes with a critical eye.

When Maggie, grumbling to herself about "Good fuh nuffin' brown-skin niggahs," turned to her work again, Annie went about on tiptoe, as if some one were asleep, watching the black woman with a look of fear and hatred in her grave eyes. She rinsed the potatoes, took up her shawl, and stole out.

Once outside the house she breathed easier, a smile flickered across her delicate face, and her long thin legs carried her quickly off the back-porch; she stood a moment, resting against the porch, looking up at the sky familiarly, as if about to speak to some unseen person up there. The slight discoloration under her eyes faded, and the blood came into her pale cheeks. Now she began to mimic Maggie.

"Yo' min' yo' got 'em clean! . . . "

She protruded her lower lip and grimaced, then threw back her head, laughed outright, and went skipping off across the yard. She stopped under a gum tree, thinking

what a queer woman Maggie was, found a suitable place, and sat down. She held between her large white teeth the black stem of a gum cone, rested back on her arms, and an expression half grave, half smile, came upon her face.

The "big house" of the Merriweather plantation sat on a long slope from which, toward the West, one had a pleasant view; and it was here that Annie, who had perforce led a rather solitary existence because her mother was a "white man's 'oman," came to idle and to dream. The sun, aslant, hung over the serrated border of the dark trees in the far distance; beyond the gully at the foot of the hill along which was a blackberry thicket, a grey mist was already rising over the young cotton.

Tiring of the prospect, she suddenly flung herself over and lay on her stomach; stirred by a deep tenderness, she felt that she could hug the whole world to her breast. Then with her chin resting in her thin hand, she stared up at the "big house." It was in need of paint, with its first and second story porches, and two rows of stiff, dwarfed cedars running along the plank walk down to the dusty road.

In her fancy Annie saw into every room of the house, could point out pieces of furniture with such unerring accuracy that it made everything seem strangely apart from herself. Filled with a kind of fright, she closed her eyes tight; and when she looked again into the house she saw frail Mrs. Merriweather, as pale as the white magnolia blossom, black Maggie in the kitchen, the little dark-eyed girl whom Tom loved, the girl's mother, and the tall, lean Mr. Merriweather, his skinny neck like a turkey's, who, Mammie Morey said, was her father; and then she saw Tom Merriweather, handsome and smiling, moving about in his easy, familiar manner.

Suddenly a sad, tender expression came to her face, and she thought of how she and Tom used to play together, how he began gradually to neglect her, and, when

he went away to school, to ignore her altogether, as if she did not exist; now he even showed her less consideration than he did the other negroes on the plantation. But that feeling of intimacy remained with her and made her uncomfortable in his presence; and it seemed to her only necessary that somehow he be made aware of it, of this feeling within her, for them to assume something akin to that old happy relationship. If only he would let a look in recognition of it come into his eyes . . . She had come to feel now that there was a difference between them; she could not understand it, but it was there. Negroes served the white folks, and sometimes white men fell in love with negro women. Mammie Morey, who sat all day in front of her son's cabin smoking her corn-cob pipe, had told her that some day she would be a "white man's 'oman." At first she had been frightened by this prophecy, and could only think of a white man taking her as he did the negroes' mules; but now . . . she felt a queer thrill of pride, and her thoughts became vague and misty. Though she had heard Maggie tell Spencer that very morning that Tom wanted to marry the dark-eyed girl visiting in the "big house," it hardly made any impression on her at the time; it was like when one hears of the death of a complete stranger. All white men got married.

Now she sat up, felt dissatisfied and restless, and stared a long time into space, thinking of nothing at all. There was not a breath of air stirring; down in the black-berry thicket sparrows chirped sleepily like rippling water, and a catbird called. It seemed as if all the world were quiet in silent meditation. The twilight was softly stealing over the whole world, and she was filled with that pleasant melancholy which made her lie so still.

Suddenly she heard the familiar caper of a horse; her cheeks burned as if on fire, and with guilty confusion she wished to sink down into the earth; but when

he, coming from the barns, had got opposite her, she could not resist looking up at him — even smiling. Tom Merriweather, astride a shining black mare with quivering flanks, looked straight into her eyes with a smirk on his face; and though there was not the least sign of recognition in his expression, a pleasant chill passed over Annie and her eyes shone with inexpressible joy. He had looked at her! She watched him with a tender expression on her face until, in a cloud of white dust, he disappeared over the rise in the road.

Now she rested back on her arms, looked up at the soft blue sky and dreamed. He wore no hat and his light hair was like silk. As she recalled the way he had looked at her, her weak lips parted in a smirk just like his. She sat thus for some time as motionless as a statue; then suddenly her big eyes glistened, the smudge-like color under them deepened, and that insatiable flame which lay hidden in them flickered and died away. "He was thinkin' o' nothin' but dat ole hoss," she murmured; and in her heart there came a dreariness that was like an ache.

Now a soft afterglow hung suspended as if in the center of things and filled the world with unreality. She finally rose with a feeling that, though the whole world lay before her, she lived nevertheless in a kind of prison. Why was it so?

She went, dragging her toes, slowly towards the house; and a vague fear of Maggie lurked in her brain. From across the dark fields came the soft strumming of a guitar and female voices singing softly in close harmony;

Glo-o-o-ry Land; Glo-o-o-ry Land;

Yes, I'm goin' to the Glo-o-o-ry Land!

Then she heard the harsh voice of Maggie.

"Annie! Yo' Annie! Come in dis kitchen. Yo' good-fuh-nuffin' little yallah niggah!"

BRIEF REVIEW

Poetic Values: Their Reality and Our Need of Them, by JOHN G. NEIHARDT. (Macmillan, \$1.75). I am so enthusiastic over this book that I am conscious of a prudence which warns: "Be careful; don't go too far." But I believe I am not going too far when I say that this is the best statement of the theory of poetry in recent years, perhaps the best (and there have been many) since Shelley's *Defense*. It correlates the best in modern psychology, criticism, esthetics, and mysticism in a cogently stated exposition of the psychic basis for the writing and appreciation of poetry.

There is not room here for any adequate discussion of this stimulating little essay, but I must at least set forth its thesis. Mr. Neihardt rejects the limitation of the human spirit to activity on only one plane of consciousness; he believes other planes than that upon which scientific observations are made have a great validity; and he shows us the relation between these other planes and poetry. This sounds crude as I state it, though perhaps obvious enough. But Mr. Neihardt, who writes admirably and thinks profoundly, is both cogent and delightful.

In brief, this restatement of the age-old poet's creed has derived from contemporary science and philosophy new and powerful aids to popular acceptance.

F. L. M.

BIOGRAPHICAL

DUDLEY CARROLL was born in Kentucky. He is a lawyer now in government service. His "Goat Hill" appeared in *Phantasmus* for July, 1924.

RAYMOND KRESENSKY, whose work has appeared in *THE MIDLAND* before, as well as in other periodicals, now lives in Chicago.

BENJAMIN ROSENBAUM, an Iowan, is now in England as an Oxford scholar. He has published widely.

MRS. MARY WOLFE THOMPSON has contributed tales to former issues of *THE MIDLAND* and other magazines. She is the author of *Farmtown Tales* and *Shoemakers' Shoes*, two books for children. Her home is in Brooklyn.

